

## DEMONS AND FAIRIES

By EILEEN CHANG

*China has a vast, richly populated borderland, the borderland of the beyond, the borderland between superstition and religion. In her whimsical meanderings in these realms, the authoress does not attempt to answer religious or ethical questions. But in her own amusing way she succeeds in conveying to us a great deal of information on the mentality of the Chinese masses.—K.M.*

**A** ROUGH survey of current Chinese thought would force us to the conclusion that there is no such thing as the Chinese religion. The Chinese intelligentsia has always been staunchly atheistic. We are not prepared to estimate how much Buddhism influenced the outstanding philosophers of China, but it is plain that, in spite of its sweeping historical onslaught, Buddhism leaves little lasting impression on the average educated man. It is doubtless owing to this agnostic tendency that Chinese literature is pervaded by a great sadness. It finds joy only in materialistic details, which explains why traditional novelists dwell so tirelessly on the unabridged items in meals and love-making (complete menus are often given for no specific purpose). The details can be gay and distracting whereas the theme is invariably pessimistic. All generalizations on life point to nothingness.

Poets and thinkers all over the world are aware of this sense of futility; what differentiates the Chinese from the rest is that it always comes as a first revelation and stays in that stage. One Chinese after another sees the withering of a flower and shudders at the impermanence of life, but none ventures any further from that point. The thought of inescapable doom does not drive him to despair, to slackness, to gluttony or excessive sensuality, which to the European may seem the logical reaction.

An educated Chinese does not believe that man personally is heading anywhere in particular on his journey through time, and the same applies to the human race. What, then, is the point of exist-

ence? He would counter that we exist, whether there is a point or not. It matters little what we do with ourselves but, since life is best enjoyed when properly lived, it is for our own happiness that we should behave ourselves—by which is implied the fulfillment of domestic and social obligations. Anything beyond that is left a blank—not a vaporous mass of mystical possibilities, but the absolute arresting of thought, the severe white space in the upper portion of a Chinese painting, the indispensable blank without which the picture would lose its balance. Both in art and life, the most difficult thing is to know when to stop, and the Chinese pride themselves on the virtue of restraint.

Of course, the lower classes cannot maintain themselves in this rarefied atmosphere of polite lack of interest. However, what to them passes for religion is only an accretion of disjointed superstitions—the belief in fortunetelling, ghosts, fox fairies, vegetarianism, etc. The only idea which seems to be shared by the educated and uneducated alike is ancestor worship, and on the part of the intelligentsia this is pure sentimentality untinged by any religious significance, in other words, the mere extension of filial duties beyond the grave.

### THE CHINESE WISH

But if we probe deeper into the matter we find a religious background common to all. The only difference in its effect upon the learned and the vulgar is that the former believe more than they profess and the latter profess more than they believe. Much of this vague psycholog-

ical setting consists of Buddhism which, mingled with Taoism and the astrology and fairy tales of the later form of Taoism and soaked for centuries in the Chinese mind, becomes something radically different from what it was originally. The superstitions of the lower classes are fragments detached from the vast structure which is rarely if ever viewed as a whole, being too much taken for granted. The superstitions, then, are not superstitions, since they are intelligently related to a philosophical interpretation of the universe.

Whether this philosophical system may be recognized as a religion depends upon the degree of sincerity to be found in its followers. Chinese farmers generally think they believe but dare not commit themselves to a positive answer if hard pressed. As for the intelligentsia, they are telling the truth when they pronounce themselves disbelievers, and yet surreptitiously this religious background colors their thought and actions because it is what they would like to believe. Nowadays even the most pious would concede that much in religion is wishful thinking. It may interest us to examine the Chinese wish.

#### BUDDHIST HELL IN CHINA

The Chinese have a Taoist heaven and a Buddhist hell. All souls depart to hell after death to be judged there, so that it is not simply the abode of the damned in the Christian sense. The Shadowy Region, though first conceived as a land of eternal twilight, is often pictured as a normal city in which the chief attraction for tourists is the prison house with its eighteen floors of torture chambers. It is not uncommon for the souls of living men to issue forth from their bodies during sleep and wander into hell, where they meet old acquaintances who show them all the sights.

The physical aspects of the ghost vary in different accounts. The more academic view, based on the theory that a ghost is nothing but condensed breath, the gaseous essence of a disembodied personality, has it that a ghost looks like

a black or gray silhouette, and that, susceptible to the wind, it wears away with the passage of time, so that old ghosts are smaller than new ones. However, popular imagination tends to make the ghost a realistic parody of the deceased.

Arrested by the ghost police, the souls of the deceased are tried in a court presided over by the king of hell and an elaborate bureaucracy chosen from among competent ghosts. In exceptional cases of marvelous virtue the acquitted prisoners climb heavenward on a golden ladder. For the sinners who stay to suffer, the method of torture varies with the nature of the offense. Bribery and corruption, for instance, are punishable by the drinking of melted copper.

#### TRANSMIGRATION OF SOULS

The middling people transmigrate. The circumstances and incidents in the next life are determined by the person's behavior in the last. A good man is born into a rich family. If he has been good but not unblemished he is born into a rich family as a girl—women's lot being harder than men's. If he has behaved badly he is born into the poorer classes or the lower species of the animal kingdom. Butchers turn into pigs. One who died with debts unpaid becomes a horse or a cow to work for the debtor. (Hence the Chinese exclaim in gratitude: "I'll become a cow or horse in my next life to repay your kindness.")

Before they leave, the souls are forced to drink the enchanted soup of forgetfulness which obliterates the past. They are driven up a great spiked wheel at the top of which they look down in terror and, goaded from behind, fall down—into the earthly midwives' hands. While the belief in transmigration is common in many lands outside China, perhaps nowhere else is it so clearly visualized. Babies have blue birthmarks on their buttocks because they hesitated to jump off the wheel and were sent toppling off by a kick. Mothers dandle them and reproachfully ask: "Were you so unwilling to come?"

# LEGAL COMPLEXITIES

The punishment of sins may be carried out in hell, or in the next life, or in this life, in which case an impious son would himself be provided with trying children, and a woman who whips slave girls on the back would suffer from a painful skin disease on her own back. Sometimes the retribution takes place simultaneously on earth and in hell. A visitor to hell may see a lady of his acquaintance being whipped on the back; he learns upon his return that she has contracted a skin disease and concludes that her soul must be mysteriously present in two places.

Again, the legal process of arrest and trial is not always observed. In numerous cases when one person misuses another, causing the death of the latter, the court may forego the formalities and give the offended party the satisfaction of catching the criminal himself. The ghost takes possession of the man, who exposes his secret guilt in the voice of the deceased, and then commits suicide. Another way, still less constitutional, applicable only to outrageous offenses, is by thunder. The Thunder God strikes down the wicked with a blow, and on the charred back is written an account of the crime. Specimens of "thunder writing" have been collected and published in book form.

Not being stereotyped, the administration of justice in the underworld leaves much room for conjecture and free interpretation. Hence the Chinese theory of poetic justice is faultlessly constructed, easy to prove, impossible to disprove.

There is nothing obscure about the Chinese supernatural. The jurisdiction of the Dark is an exact counterpart of Chinese jurisdiction at an advanced stage of civilization, only that it is a perfected counterpart. However, because of its human basis, the institution is not infallible. Before being taken to hell, souls of the dead often undergo preliminary trials at the city temples, the branch offices of hell. Deceased governors of good repute are appointed city

gods to preside over the local courts, and they are open to corruption. The head office in hell, though more conscientious, occasionally makes a mistake in its records and arrests a man before his time. After much delay, when the matter is straightened out, the man has to "borrow a carcass to come back to life," his own body being in an advanced stage of decomposition.

## WHY SUCH INTEREST IN THE COFFIN

Since transmigration ensures the independence of the soul from the body, which is only transitory, the corpse plays no part in Chinese theology as it does in Egyptian theology. It appears strange, therefore, that the Chinese should place such importance on the corpse. Whatever the trouble and expense incurred, the coffin of one who died thousands of miles away from home must be brought back to the family graveyard. The better a Chinese coffin is, the heavier. Designed to be carried by any number of men from four to sixty-four, the coffin in a house on fire presents an extremely painful dilemma, in which the right thing for the family to do is to stay and dig a hole in the ground and push the coffin into it at the risk of being burned to death. Warm, dry graves are usually insisted on; the offspring would be shattered to find parental graves wet and windy, peopled by white ants. Hence the growth and elaboration of geomancy, the study of the influence on filial fortune of the conditions and surroundings of the ancestral grave.

The preoccupation in parental remains can be explained by the abnormal development of filial sentimentality in China. The Chinese demand that filial affection be a grand consuming passion, and since it is the only legitimate passion it achieves heroic proportions. A study of the behavior of model sons who, with the fervor of cannibalistic self-sacrifice, cut pieces of flesh from their thighs to make a medicinal soup for sick parents, shows them to be people madly in love. It is only to be expected that they should be hypersensitive about the post-mortem comforts of the parents.

There remains the baffling phenomenon of the Chinese who attends to his own coffin with tremendous care. He is perhaps dictated less by self-love than by practicality and farsightedness. Inhabitants of an agrarian society store up the necessities of life as a matter of course. It is often said of a rich Chinese that "the rice rots in his granary." In a more spacious era than the present, coffins and burial clothes number among the household goods a Chinese would not neglect to store up in making provisions for the days to come.

The attentions paid to the physical welfare of the dead are not entirely uncalled-for, because the souls on trial may be indefinitely detained in hell before they pass on to another life. A controversy was once waged over the question, whether souls on the loose are attached to their tombs or to the ancestral tablets. The fabric of the Chinese religion has many loose threads which sometimes get joined. For instance, determinism and the theory of Virtue Rewarded seem contradictory, but later they are harmonized by the introduction of the last-minute amendment which alters predetermined circumstances on the strength of some good deed. Old men fated to die without an heir are provided with sons; dull scholars pass examinations; men on the brink of death have their lives prolonged for ten or twenty years, and so on.

#### NATURAL AND UNNATURAL DEATH

The Chinese have marked gradations of feeling toward different kinds of death. A standard phrase in funeral announcements illustrates the ideal end: "Died of old age, in the main bedroom." This implies that the deceased was the head of a household, properly attended to, properly mourned. The Chinese sense of propriety does not rule out the decorative coffin with the scene "Lue Pu flirting with Sable Cicada" carved at its head, or the funeral orchestra which plays "Oh Susanna, Don't You Cry."

The Chinese speak of the dead as having "vanished as a fairy," or "gone

west" (to India, the native land of Buddha) and refer to the coffin as "the vessel of longevity." Glossed over by such euphemisms, natural death becomes more or less acceptable, while accidents and suicides, among other forms of unnatural death, are still abhorred. One who dies a violent death is deprived of the right to transmigrate until somebody else dies in the same manner to take his place. Eager for life, the ghost tries to tempt others to suicide. Whenever anyone feels depressed, the ghost smells him out as a possibility. If it has previously taken its own life by hanging, it dangles a loop before the prospective substitute, who sees, framed in the loop, the picture of a lovely garden. He sticks his head in for a closer look, and the rope tightens. With regard to accidents, if a car has crashed at a certain street corner, other cars crash regularly at the same spot. Another example is the swimming beach at Kiaochow, on the outskirts of Shanghai, which is well known for its annual cases of drowning. The ghosts seem governed by instincts like spiders and beasts of prey.

#### SUBHUMAN SWINDLERS

The Chinese associate the supernatural with the lower forms of life. The fox fairies, the spirits of flowers and trees, are some of the subhuman beings aiming at human form—the most enviable state of existence as it is the most complete and satisfactory. Discontented with their poverty and ignorance, enterprising animal and vegetable spirits are driven to thieving. They usually come to men in the form of beautiful women, to suck up the essence of life.

The human world and that of the ghosts and goblins, superimposed upon each other and occupying the same space at the same time, make up a very crowded universe. Snobbish supernatural beings come to plague people out of luck—those who are either physically or morally debilitated—but always keep clear of the fortunate, the upright, and those with official rank. Men live under the terrific combined pressure of the censorship of

human society plus that of the underworld plus that of the hosts of covetous spirits who take advantage of the slightest weakness. However, a thinking man has nothing to fear from the spirits because theirs is a weaker, dimmer, more diluted form of existence. Stories tell of deceased husbands who pathetically try to prevent their wives from remarrying, and always ineffectively. On the other hand, the life of the spirits is more monotonous and limited than men's, though perfected in certain aspects.

#### THE TAOIST HEAVEN

The Taoist heaven is only Taoist in that, despite accounts of palaces of jade and jasper, there prevails an atmosphere of clean white emptiness, symbolic of the "Do Nothing" policy of Lao-tse. The rest of the lore is all based upon an accumulation of aboriginal beliefs. The Jade Emperor rules directly over a huge celestial bureaucracy, and indirectly over earth and hell. He also holds feudalistic sway over various divine localities. The talented beauties of the earth are eligible for the position of girl attendants in the divine court if they die young. A celestial maiden who accidentally breaks a vase or giggles during a ceremony is sent down to earth to love and suffer and provide material for popular legends, which generally represent the brief absence from eternal bliss as being enjoyable.

Intense specialization among the heavenly bureaucrats gives us the Literary God, the Military God, the Money God, the God of Longevity, etc. To every city there is a City God, to every village a Field God, to every house two Door Gods and one Kitchen God, and to every lake and river a Dragon God. In addition to these there are the Jobless Fairies.

#### BLASPHEMY TOLERATED

For all its structural grandeur the Chinese heaven is painted in paler tones and with a less sure touch than the Chinese hell because it has less to do with the vital concerns of humanity. However, if the Chinese never take heaven literally they can induce in themselves a state of faith whenever it suits

their purpose. A plain example of their tenacious imagination can be drawn from the commercial radio broadcasts. Lovers in a Shao-shing Opera (a form of local drama) tearfully bid each other good-by for the thousandth time, and when the girl pauses to take breath the announcer intervenes: "Mr. Wang of 2172 Bubbling Well Road orders half-a-dozen bottles of Hongkong Foot Cure." Apparently the interruption does not break the spell.

Because of the Chinese lack of susceptibility to anticlimaxes, their religion can stand any amount of blasphemy. The title "Jade Emperor" is also a playful synonym for "wife," especially a domineering one. The line of demarcation to be found between faith and fancy is very thin. Among the deities we see Queen Wang Moo, monstrously ugly when she first appeared in Chinese myths but later glamourized and turned into a beautiful old lady; and the Flaxen Maid, one of the Eight Immortals. Both are often present in birthday-party decorations but never seriously worshiped. The Chinese find no objection to these merely ornamental figures associating on equal terms with the Goddess of Mercy, whereas no Christian can imagine Santa Claus in company with his God.

#### SALVATION MINIMIZED

The Chinese salvation varies with the individual. For those content with an eternal chain of humdrum lives, it is comparatively easy to do the right thing since there is no right beyond the harmony of feeling and reason, and that should be plain to all. One only has to "carry out what the heart is at peace with." Theoretically the Chinese agree that the intention matters more than the consequences of the deed, and yet with characteristic inconsistency alms are openly solicited and given for purely selfish ends—to "manufacture blessings" for the donor. Beggars reassure you that "not one copper will fall on empty ground."

Those who are distressed with life as it is and wish to mold it to their hearts' desire, resort to the Buddhist formula of



wisdom arrived at through silence, solitude, inaction. The principle affects the Chinese roughly in two ways. The more passive among the faithful—old ladies mostly, and women on whom fate has been unduly harsh, widows and wives cold-shouldered by their husbands—believe in shutting themselves up in a simply furnished room, where they quieten the heart by copying Buddhist classics which they do not try to understand. Seclusion eliminates the possibility of doing evil, and the negative good thus achieved ameliorates the circumstances in the next life, where they may expect a better chance of worldly happiness. As they usually find a complete withdrawal from life impracticable, generous concessions are made. Take vegetarianism, for instance, which not only eliminates the sin of killing but also has positive value when pushed to the extreme of abstaining from all cooked food—food contaminated by smoke and fire. A man who lived on a diet of fruits would grow white hair all over his body and leap off as a fairy ape, thereby gaining immortal life. However, Chinese vegetarians cling with such delight to butchered meat that they have invented "vegetarian ham" and "vegetarian chicken" and, best of all, the system of "flowered vegetarianism" (opposite of "plain vegetarianism") observed only on the 1st and 15th of the month, or on all days in the month with a 3 or 7 in the number, or on the divine birthdays only. Thus pious Chinese shuffle their feet in and out of the world, trusting that the clerk in hell will faithfully record every millimeter of the retreat.

#### ATHLETIC SALVATION

As for the young men of action, these withdraw from life temporarily to achieve knowledge and power so that they return to the world stronger, purer, and capable of setting things right. They sit still for hours, their minds a vacuum. At dawn and midnight they do deep-breathing exercises to imbibe the essence of the sun and moon and help develop "the great outpouring air" of the superman. To the Chinese, gymnastic exercises always have some subtle moral significance

associated with "building up the breath" or "training the breath." The skill of the boxer and the inward peace of the hermit are complementary.

This belief in the athletic way to salvation is typified by Chinese adventure stories, the equivalent of the boy-scout tales of the West. Extremely popular among adolescents and a considerable percentage of grown men, these sagas deal with knightly reformers who first learned boxing, archery, and military tactics in the mountains. The theory that to improve life one must first be detached, is in a more practical form universally accepted in China.

#### BOHEMIAN FAIRIES

Not content with improving upon life, some aim above the human estate. Most men would rather be fairies than gods because the status of a Buddhist deity, usually the reward of toilsome saintliness, entails a tremendous amount of work and responsibility as a dignified member of the celestial bureaucracy. A kindly mayor automatically becomes a god after his death if the citizens build a temple to him in gratitude. Exceptionally chaste women, like the one who chose to be bitten to death by the mosquitoes of a neighboring swamp rather than spend the night under the same roof with a stranger, usually have temples erected to their names; but whether they continue to enjoy the solicitous attentions of the population depends entirely upon whether they do their duty by the locality in respect to the crops, the weather, the answering of private prayers.

The more enviable fairies, of Taoist origin, lead Bohemian lives replete with the kind of pleasures advocated by Lin Yu-tang. The normal process of attaining fairyhood demands half a century or more of ascetism in the Indian style, though without any mortification of the flesh. Miraculous short cuts are provided by alchemy, by friendly aid from the upper quarters. A fairy disguised as an itinerant monk or Taoist priest comes among men to pick out those with "the root of wisdom." After the exchange of

one or two ethereal epigrams, the new convert disappears together with the redeemer. Fifty years later an old acquaintance of the chosen may meet him at the foot of a mountain, his beard as black as ever.

Again, a man may join the fairies through sheer luck. The fox, self-educated in magic and theology, learns to mold its breath into a shiny ball which it is in the habit of tossing about on moonlit nights. If a man catches hold of the ball and swallows it quickly, the fox is done for. Animals which aim at immortality must first pass through the human stage and, as they have a longer distance to go than men, they are often robbed on the way of the fruits of their labor.

Sheltered and leisurely, the fairies are chiefly occupied with the mild pursuits of chess-playing, music, travel, and drinking, which in the East is considered more a cultivated pastime than a vice. They exist on a different plane of time, one day in fairyland being equal to a thousand years on earth. It has been argued that on the part of the fairies this speaks only of a benumbed consciousness.

#### THE "EARTH FAIRIES"

As the fairies have no sexual or family life, men who wanted the best of both worlds created the amphibious species of "earth fairies," a comparatively late invention. The "earth fairies" are no different from ordinary millionaires except for the additional blessing of immortal youth. Tucked away in an untrodden hill or valley, their abode is a Mohammedan paradise with more privacy to it. An occasional contact with humanity increases the enjoyment of the superiority of their position. Stories are told of how a man sailing across the Tung Ting Lake sees on a pleasure boat a former friend who has married into a family of "earth fairies." He is invited on board where he is magnificently entertained and loaded with presents upon departure. Directly he steps off the vessel, the all-girl orchestra strikes up the drums to invoke a mist, into which the pleas-

ure boat dissolves, never to be seen again.

Fairyhood leaves a Chinese alone to enjoy his riches, free from all claims upon him by members of his family and clan. Though pleasurable in this respect, this irresponsible state of existence deprives him of the opportunity of practicing his art of living with people, in which the Chinese excel. Everybody loathes to give up his speciality, however irksome its exercising may be to him. Hence we observe the twofold reaction of desire and distaste in the Chinese attitude toward fairyhood.

#### LOVE OF REPETITION

The Chinese heaven, treated with less respect than their hell, is in fact superfluous. Hell is good enough for the majority. If they have behaved tolerably well they may look forward to an infinite succession of slightly variegated human lives, in which they fulfill predestined connections, unwittingly sow seeds for future attachments, tie knots of hatred and have them unfastened—the delightfully giddy mating of cause and effect. The Chinese have taken a fancy to life in this particular aspect, and once the Chinese find anything to their liking they keep to it. The film *The Opium War* has now been made a Peking Opera and, like the novel *Autumn Quince*, will soon appear as a stage play, a Shao-shing Opera, a farce, a long ballad in the Shanghai dialect; and the identical audience will faithfully go to see it in every possible form. The sustained repetition in Ravel's *Bolero* is always present in classical Chinese music, whether the subject be "Autumn in the Hang Palace" or "Wild Geese Alighting on Level Sand." The steadfast rumination of a recurrent theme never comes to a climax and stops only to begin anew as another composition.

Human life, possibly unsatisfactory when taken by itself, has nothing wanting when viewed as a chain of such lives. This can find a parallel in none of the later imported religions. Thus against the high-pressure missionary enterprises

of the different forms of Christianity the native creed is able to hold its own, without any counterattack, unsupported by large capital, without any spokesman, propaganda literature, any consciously created atmosphere of peace and beauty, or even any classics to fall back on (Buddhist classics, never popularized, are as good as nonexistent).

#### MENTAL HAZINESS A VIRTUE

However, we have not yet settled the question as to whether the Chinese religion is a religion in the full sense of the word. The lower classes regard piety as the logical choice, because, if they believe in hell and conduct themselves accordingly, and later find it all lies, no harm is done, whereas the atheist runs the totally unnecessary risk of damnation. This explains the traditional Chinese toleration and respect for other religions. If they antagonized the Christians and then found themselves in a Christian hell, the situation would be embarrassing indeed.

And again, the Chinese have an aversion to precision, comparing it to "playing the guitar with the bridges glued." An intelligent scholar "likes to read but does not try to understand thoroughly." But, however much mental haziness is taken as a virtue, in religion there are bound to be critical moments which force one to answer yes or no.

#### THE ULTIMATE TEST

When a man has lost everything, what is it that raises him from the vale of despair and urges him on to another future? In China, such cases do not exist. Although the Chinese are known to be diligent followers of the motto, "having eaten the most bitter of bitter things, you can then be a man above other men," if they fall down after a dizzy climb they never rise again. The one quality they admire effusively in foreigners is perseverance. Every other day in the Chinese newspapers Edison and Franklin reaffirm that "failure is the mother of success." The modern Chinese prize this pugnacity above all else because they feel it lacking in themselves.

When a Chinese gives up he may not have lost confidence in himself but he suspects that what he is driving at is not coherent with the general trend of incidents, that it is not timely though it may be good. Heaven is never on the side of a defeated cause, however worthy, and in this the Chinese heaven as conceived by the intellectuals coincides with the modern idea of nature rather than the benevolent Christian God. Here we see how the scholarly view influences the popular religion in which one is invariably punished for a crime—that is, interference with the natural course of life—but not necessarily rewarded for isolated goodness.

#### THE CHINESE IN DESPAIR

Too readily compliant, the Chinese have no sportsmanship to speak of. In a race, when one person has reached the goal, all the others stop running. Foreigners find the Chinese exceedingly annoying in their ability to dismiss whatever they cannot do with a single smart phrase.

After his downfall the great man retires to a farm and puts his hopes in his son. If he has no farm to retire to and no son to lean upon, he abandons what he does not possess to become a monk, a Taoist priest, or a hermit. Although nowadays even hermitage is costly, retreat is not impossible for a coolie, a cobbler in the street, so long as the heart is kept vacant and aloof.

We wonder why suicide as a means of escape seldom occurs to the very poor in poverty-stricken China, arguing that death must be preferable to the incredible wretchedness of the beggars or coolies. In the case of absolute destitution, the reversion to bestiality, reason gives way to pure instinct; but with the Chinese the desire to survive at any cost is reasoned and deliberate in addition to being instinctive. They say, "a good death is not as good as a bad life." Of course, there are limits to everything. Spectators frankly look upon that station of life with abhorrence, as being a hell on earth, and are only reconciled to it by the



belief that the beggars are suffering for sins committed in some other life. It is doubtful, however, whether such an explanation makes life more bearable to the beggars themselves. Then is there no religion for the beggars?

#### LIMITATIONS OF THE HUMAN SCOPE

The beggars are not human, because, to the Confucian, humanity has a very limited scope. The most important prerequisite for the human status is personal connections, and even those are narrowed down to the set pattern of the Five Relations (those between lord and subject, parent and child, husband and wife, brothers, friends). Confucianism is not practicable among the very poor since it presupposes the possession of a little money or land with which to support a family and answer to the exactions of society. As the beggars cannot afford families or any human relations except the demoralizing one of exploiting other people's pity, they become religious outlaws.

The poor must be distinguished from the destitute. The poorer classes of all nations are known for their religious zeal, because the promises of future felicity alleviate present discomforts so that they are more disposed to believe. The Chinese poor cannot be more credulous than the rest of their compatriots, since the Chinese as a race can charm themselves into believing anything. If the Chinese proletariat seems more religious than its betters, it is due to the overcrowded state of existence, which involves more human relations, restrictions, and responsibilities than usual. They experience the closely watched conditions taught by our re-

ligion in an intenser form than those whose wealth entitles them to greater freedom and independence.

Dying men are also beyond the pale of human sympathy, for the egotism induced by pain causes a severance of human relations. Death-bed psychology is as yet unexplored in China. All literature touching upon the subject of death deals exclusively with the reaction of the onlookers; hence we see much of the grotesque or plainly farcical, like the ghost policeman named Impermanence, a tall clown in white, with a high hat labeled "look upon me and prosper."

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Seriously interested neither in the source nor the end of existence, the Chinese have hitherto resisted the general movement of all civilizations toward the "why" in life. According to the Chinese, preoccupation with things outside the human scope gives opportunity to the supernatural spirits to make their influences felt, and such communication is dangerous aside from being unpleasant. Men all over the world refrain from thoughts of death if they can help it, and the Chinese can. They concentrate on the small illuminated area of life as they see it. We must own after all that the Chinese religion is no less a religion because it has effect only within the scope outside which we find nothing but a vague comprehensive sadness. All is vanity or, as the singsong girl phrased it in the Peking Opera "The Courtyard of the Black Dragon":

I wash my hands and clean my nails,  
To sew shoes to be trodden in the  
mud.